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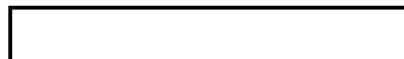
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26 January 1965
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UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

SUBJECT : Communist Military Posture and Capabilities
Vis-a-Vis Southeast Asia

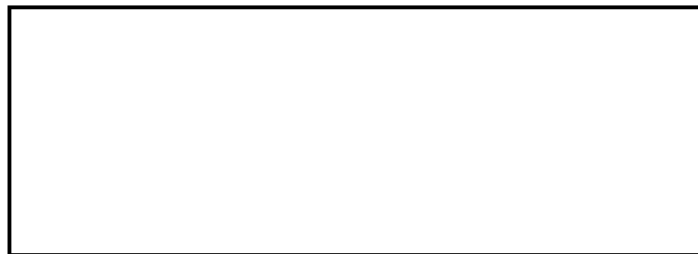
REFERENCE : Special Annex to USIB-M-367, 22 January 1965,
Item 4

1. Pursuant to the reference, the attached USIB Intelligence Memorandum on the subject has been concurred in by the Board as of 26 January 1965.

2. Accordingly, the Memorandum is circulated herewith for information and appropriate dissemination.

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Attachment



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26 January 1965

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD MEMORANDUM

Communist Military Posture and Capabilities
Vis-a-vis Southeast Asia

SUMMARY

Since the Tonkin Gulf incident last August, the Chinese Communists have stepped up efforts to improve their military posture in South China, particularly their air defense capabilities. There have been no significant Chinese ground force deployments, but forces already present within 200 miles of the Sino-DRV border are capable of conducting major ground operations. They could be heavily reinforced within a few weeks from the Chinese interior.

In recent weeks we have noted significant Communist troop movements in Laos, concentrated in the northern Panhandle area. Although a reinforcement of DRV forces in Laos occurs each year at the end of the rainy season, the focus has been farther to the south and the totals probably exceed those estimated in recent years.

This deployment has improved Communist capability to defend their positions. It also improves their capability to undertake offensive operations and to supply reinforcements for the Viet Cong.

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Peiping's Ground Threat

1. The Chinese have long been interested in improving their military capabilities in those parts of China bordering Southeast Asia. They have been building up their military facilities--airfields, barracks areas, supply points, etc.--since at least 1960, especially in the Kunming Military Region. In conjunction with these activities extensive road-building projects were initiated. Work on a rail line north from Kunming which will link with the main Chinese rail arteries was resumed in 1963 and recently was given a higher priority, but it will still be a year or more before it is completed.

2. While this construction has been going forward, Peiping has maintained a fairly large ground force in both the Kunming and Canton military regions. The strength of this force has remained essentially unchanged for the last eight or nine years. There are about 185,000 troops within 200 miles of the Laos - North Vietnamese border of which some 135,000 are infantry, artillery and security troops which could be moved southward on short notice. These forces could be further augmented within a matter of weeks.

3. On 19 January, Peiping issued a decree extending by one year the terms of service for the Army, Air Force, and Navy. It is not clear just how the decree will be implemented. It may be designed to improve technical capabilities by retaining highly trained personnel or it may result in a very substantial increase in the size of the armed forces. In any case, it is another indication that Peiping is concerned about its state of military readiness.

Communist Air Deployments and Air Defense Measures

4. Peiping, made aware in early August that the US was willing to use its air power against Communist targets, reacted quickly. The Chinese immediately moved a regiment of jet fighters into North Vietnam's Phuc Yen airfield and in the following four months more than doubled their air strength in South China from Canton westward from 150 to nearly 350 jet fighters. This air build-up

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included a number of MIG-19 (Farmer) and a few MIG-21 (Fishbed) jet fighters.

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Since mid-December jet fighter strength at Phuc Yen has been further increased to 53.

5. The airfield under construction at Ning-ming is probably intended for use by tactical jet fighters. It is expected to be serviceable by this spring.

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There are indications that the 4,700-foot unpaved runway at this field is being improved. Another airfield near the Burma border at Peitun, which can already accommodate jet fighters, is also being improved.

6. These measures have contributed significantly to Communist air capabilities in the Sino-DRV border region.

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Chinese Naval Forces

7. Peiping's South China Fleet--the weakest of Peiping's three fleets--has increased its capability in the Tonkin Gulf since last August.

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Although the South Sea Fleet has no major naval vessels, it has numerous patrol craft and motor torpedo boats which could constitute a limited threat to US naval operations in the Tonkin Gulf.

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North Vietnamese Military Forces

8. Hanoi maintains a large, well-trained ground force with a dedicated leadership that views the conflict in Southeast Asia as a long-term operation.

9. The main element of Hanoi's military strength is its ground force, which now numbers about 225,000. Several of its major units have a long history of experience in Laos. For years the Vietnamese have moved elements of these units in and out as necessary to support the Pathet Lao. They have a demonstrated effectiveness against the Lao forces which is to some extent psychological, but there is also no doubt that these units are better trained and more determined on the battlefield.

10. Tactical air strength in North Vietnam now consists of 53 jet fighters at Phuc Yen. The extent, if any, of Chinese control over these aircraft is not known. The capability of these aircraft for effective day clear air mass interception has been improved by the appearance of height-finding radar in the North Vietnamese air defense system for ground-

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DRV Support to the Viet Cong

11. The North Vietnamese have apparently stepped up the flow of men and materiel into the hands of the Viet Cong during the past year. There is recent evidence that in at least some areas of South Vietnam the Communists have provided the Viet Cong with a family of Chinese Communist light infantry weapons, all using the same caliber of ammunition.

12. The infiltration of military personnel into South Vietnam appears to have been maintained at a high rate this year, or perhaps even stepped

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13. The appearance this year for the first time of substantial numbers of native-born northerners in the ranks of the infiltrates indicates that Hanoi is determined to push ahead with the insurrection even though it means the more open identification of North Vietnam with the Viet Cong. There has been other evidence recently of the open recruitment of northerners for service in the south.

Communist Forces in Laos

14. DRV forces in Laos normally are reduced in numbers during the rainy season and then reinforced in the fall. It has never been possible to follow these movements with precision or to assess with confidence the total number of DRV troops in Laos at any given time. We believe some DRV forces were withdrawn last summer as usual. This fall the reinforcement appears to have exceeded the level of previous years and DRV troop strength in Laos probably now exceeds the previous dry season strength which we have estimated at 9-11,000. The increase appears to be on the order of 2,000 men. This figure includes cadre for Pathet Lao units, advisers and 16 or more battalions.

15. This recent reinforcement improves existing defenses, particularly in AA artillery, for key installations and transportation routes. It also improves the Communist capability to move sharply with little or no warning against targets in Laos. Some of these reinforcements could also be infiltrated into South Vietnam.

16. The principal troop movements have been in the Plaine des Jarres area and in the northern Panhandle region. From the reopening of Route 7 to major convoy traffic in late September

an average of 15-20 trucks a day moved from North Vietnam to the Plaine carrying supplies and an undetermined number of troops. We believe about ten North Vietnamese battalions

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are now positioned in the Plaine des Jarres area and to the east along Route 7. In addition to these North Vietnamese forces, there are about 23 battalions of Pathet Lao and dissident neutralist forces in this area.

17. Farther south, the build-up dates from the middle of December, with reinforcements moving from North Vietnam along Route 12 to the Nhommarath-Mahaxay region, and south on Route 23 to the Muong Phine - Tchepone area.

18. The Communists have moved an estimated 1,000-1,500 troops--reportedly North Vietnamese --to buttress their forces in the Nhommarath-Mahaxay area. Communist forces in the general area before this movement comprised about 9-11 battalions: 1 North Vietnamese, 6 Pathet Lao, and 2-4 mixed PL/PAVN. These forces probably could easily seize the lightly defended town of Thakhek on the Mekong.

19. A considerably larger number of Communist troops--possibly as many as 4-5,000 including a substantial number of North Vietnamese--have deployed southward from the North Vietnamese border area toward the Muong Phine - Tchepone area. [REDACTED]

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20. Positioned astride Route 9, these forces, in addition to those previously present, have improved their the capability of moving westward into the Mekong Valley to attack the government strongpoints at Savannakhet and Seno. However, such a move would encounter sizable FAR forces engaged in operations in this area. These Communist forces also have the capability to move southeast along the border for a subsequent move into South Vietnam. This move would entail much greater logistic problems and would take considerably longer to develop. Such a move might be taken in conjunction with attacks by the three regimental-sized Viet Cong units already present in the northern provinces of South Vietnam. Such a Communist threat to South Vietnam might be more difficult for the US to recognize in its developing stages, but if carried through could seriously jeopardize Saigon's already shaky control over the northern provinces.

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Communist Propaganda

21. Communist propaganda continues to reflect the determination of Hanoi to push ahead in South Vietnam in the face both of stepped-up air strikes in the Laos corridor and of rumors in the Western press of US intentions to carry the war in South Vietnam to the north. North Vietnam's defiant attitude was reflected in its reiterations of earlier pledges of unspecified support, repeated in connection with the 20 and 22 December anniversaries of the formation of the Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese Army, respectively. There was no hint of any give in Communist terms for a negotiated settlement. The North Vietnamese party daily on 19 December stated that Hanoi would not talk peace "until the aggressor abandons his schemes."

22. Moscow and particularly Peiping are giving strong propaganda backing to Hanoi and have reiterated earlier pledges of support for North Vietnam in the event of US attacks on it. The Chinese repeated their earlier warning that US use of Laotian territory to expand the war in Vietnam could spread the "flames of war" throughout Indochina. Moscow has also cautioned Souvanna Phouma along similar lines.

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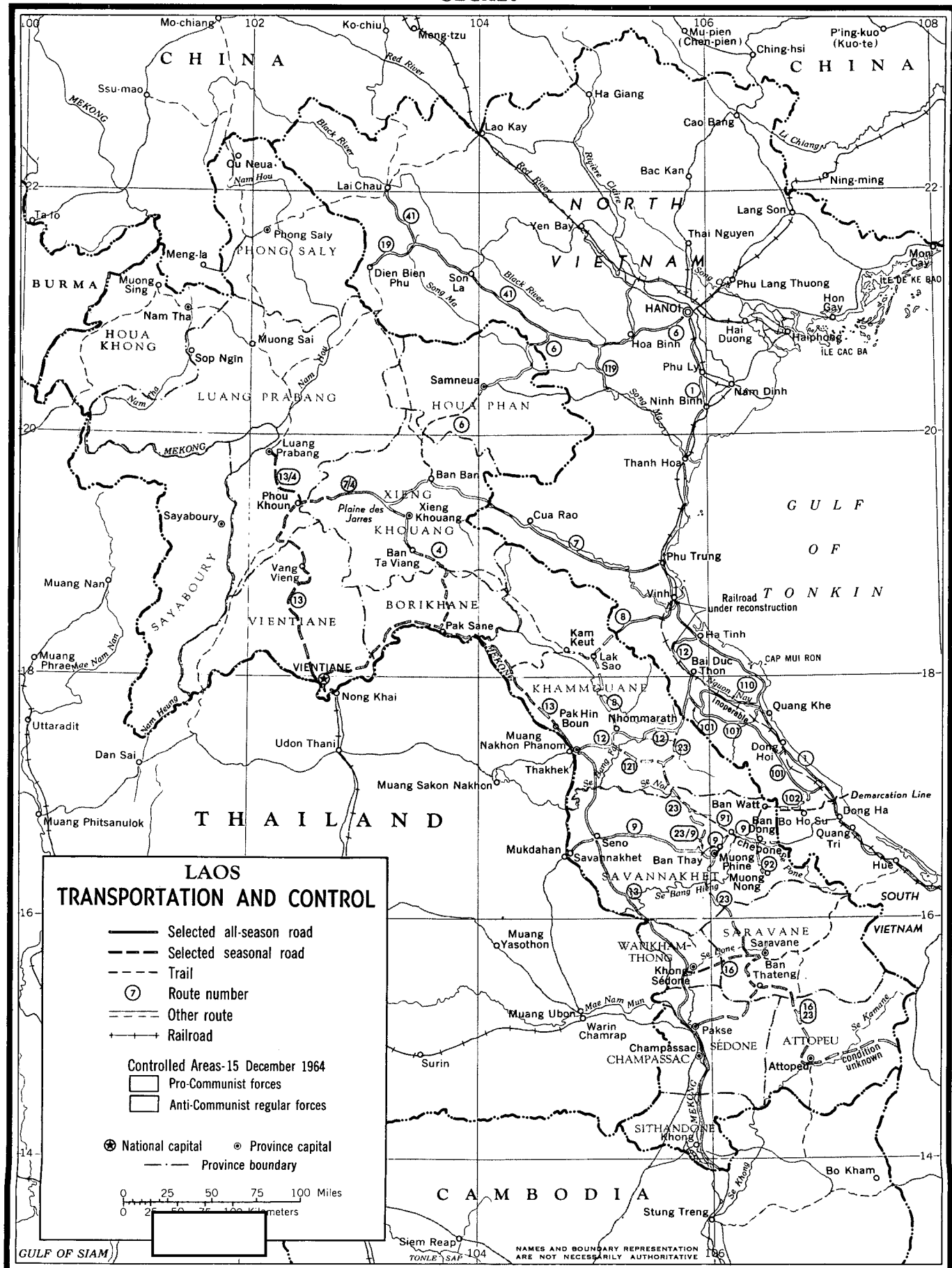
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